

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 2694

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, OVIP, AS, US (PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM)

SUBJECT: BACKGROUND TO VISIT OF PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM

TO WASHINGTON MAY 7-8

1. PRIMIN WHITLAM'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON MAY 7 AND 8 OCCURS AT A TIME WHEN WHITLAM IS UNDER SHARP ATTACK OVER HIS HANDLING OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES AND ESPECIALLY OVER OPPOSITION CHARGES, SUPPORTED BY VIRTUALLY ALL NEWSPAPERS, THAT HE HAS DEALT DISHONESTLY WITH PARLIAMENT IN ASSERTING THAT HE PLAYED AN EVENHANDED ROLE IN RECENT WEEKS IN DEALING WITH HANOI AND SAIGON. WHITLAM IS ALSO IN A PECK OF TROUBLE OVER HIS GOVERNMENT'S EVIDENT INCAPABILITY TO COPE WITH MOUNTING ECONOMIC WOES. LATEST PUBLIC OPINION POLLS REFLECT THESE FACTS. ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT EXPECT OPPOSITION LEADER MALCOLM FRASER TO PRESS AT THIS TIME FOR ELECTIONS, HE WILL LEAD A MAJOR PARLIAMENTARY ATTACK ON WHITLAM IMMEDIATELY ON LATTER'S RETURN FROM WASHINGTON MAY 11.

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2. WE THEREFORE ASSUME THAT WHITLAM WILL DO ALL HE CAN

DURING THE COURSE OF HIS WASHINGTON STAY TO SHOW HIS COUNTRYMEN THAT HE STANDS HIGH IN US ESTEEM, THAT THE US "UNDERSTANDS" HIS POSITION WITH REGARD TO INDOCHINA, AND THAT WE CONSIDER AUSTRALIA'S RECORD IN DEALING WITH REFUGEE ISSUES TO HAVE BEEN BETTER THAN THAT OF ANY OTHER FRIEND OF THE US.

3. UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, THERE WOULD BE NO PARTICULAR DISADVANTAGE TO US IN HIS BEING IN A POSITION TO MAKE SUCH CLAIMS, DRAWING ON US STATEMENTS. HOWEVER, IN THE CURRENT PHASE, SUCH STATEMENTS WILL BE MORE THAN JUST RESENTED BY THE OPPOSITION PARTIES IN AUSTRALIA. THEY WILL UNDERCUT OPPOSITION'S EFFORTS DIRECTED AT AUSTRALIA'S TAKING A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN DEALING WITH VIETNAMESE REFUGEES AS WELL AS DEVOTING MORE ATTENTION TO AUSTRALIA'S SECURITY IN THE FACE OF THE VIETNAMESE DEBACLE. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE DO NOT WANT TO MAR THE PRIMIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON IN ANY WAY. WE ALSO WANT TO ENCOURAGE TRENDS IN HIS THINKING WHICH HAVE EVOLVED SO SATISFACTORILY THIS PAST YEAR RE OUR DEFENSE FACILITIES AND CERTAIN OTHER ISSUES OF PRIME INTEREST TO THE US. WE DO NOT WANT TO APPEAR TO BE SIDING WITH EITHER GOVERNMENT OR OPPOSITION, BUT RATHER TO ALLOW THE PRESENT INTERNAL AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL FERMENT TO CONTINUE TO WORK FAVORABLY TOWARD OUR INTERESTS.

4. IT WILL OBVIOUSLY BE IMPOSSIBLE TO ARRANGE TALKS IN WASHINGTON AT THIS TIME WHICH WILL TOTALLY AVOID RISKS X OFFENDING EITHER THE GOVERNMENT OR OPPOSITION, BUT THE BEST CHANCE OF AVOIDING OFFENSE WILL BE IF THE WASHINGTON TALKS ARE CLEARLY DIRECTED TOWARDS THOSE BROAD ISSUES WHICH PRESIDENT FORD SAID IN HIS RECENT ADDRESS TO CONGRESS HE WISHED TO RAISE WITH WHITLAM AND OTHER LEADERS. WHITLAM WILL GREATLY WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A FRANK TWO-WAY EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY AS TO WHAT POLICIES AND ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN ON THE WORLD SCENE TO MAINTAIN OUR MANY COMMON INTERESTS. IT IS GENERALLY FELT HERE THAT THE US IS IN THE PROCESS OF REVIEWING POLICIES WORLD-WIDE. AS A CLOSE FRIEND AND ALLY, AUSTRALIA WILL WISH TO BE GENUINELY CONSULTED IN THIS POLICY-MAKING PROCESS, WITH ITS VIEWPOINTS REFLECTED IN THE

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FINAL PRODUCT AS FAR AS POSSIBLE. AUSTRALIA WILL ALSO REACT FAVORABLY TO ANY CLEAR-CUT REAFFIRMATION OF AMERICA'S POSITIVE COMMITMENT TO THE WORLD, THE REGION, AND, ABOVE ALL, TO ANZUS WHICH BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION STRONGLY SUPPORT. TO THE EXTENT THE TALKS (AND EXPECIALLY PUBLIC STATEMENTS) FOCUS ON MAJOR ISSUES OF MOMENT TO US. AND AUSTRALIA, THE DANGERS OF THEIR IMPINGING ON LOCAL POLITICS HERE WILL BE MINIMIZED.

5. HOPEFULLY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THESE BROAD-RANGING FRANK EXCHANGES IN WASHINGTON, OPPORTUNITIES WILL ARISE TO DISCUSS PARTICULAR ISSUES WHERE WE SEEK AUSTRALIAN COOPERATION. WASHINGTON DISCUSSIONS OFFER VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR BRINGING TOP-LEVEL CONCERN ON THESE ISSUES DIRECTLY TO PM'S PERSONAL ATTENTION, THEREBY IMPORTANTLY SUPPLEMENTING OUR EFFORTS WITH INDIVIDUAL MINISTERS IN CANBERRA. THESE ISSUES INCLUDE:

A) AUSTRALIAN ASSISTANCES IN RESETTLING A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA.

B) NPW VISITS AND WHY WE CANNOT DISCLOSE WHETHER OR NOT US NAVAL VESSELS HAVE NUCLEAR WEAPONS ABOARD.

C) OUR POSITION ON THE INDIAN OCEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF MAINTAINING REGIONAL AND GLOBAL EQUILIBRIUM.

D) COOPERATION IN PREVENTING PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (WHITLAM FEELS STRONGLY ON THIS ISSUE AND IS LIKELY TO RAISE IT).

E) THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING LIBERAL TRADE POLICIES IN THE FACE OF MOUNTING PROTECTIONIST PRESSURES.

F) OUR APPRECIATION FOR RESPONSIBLE ROLE GOA HAS TAKEN IN FIELD OF PRODUCER-CONSUMER NATION RELATIONSHIPS IN RAW MATERIALS TRADE (WHITLAM WILL BE FRESH FROM COMMONWEALTH MINISTERIAL DISCUSSIONS OF THIS QUESTIONS).

6. PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S WASHINGTON VISIT HAPPENS TO COINCIDE WITH

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THE ANNUAL CORAL SEA CELEBRATIONS IN AUSTRALIA WHERE THE HONORED GUEST THIS YEAR WILL BE HEW SECRETARY WEINBERGER, THE FIRST US CABINET MINISTER TO VISIT AUSTRALIA DURING MY 23 MONTHS HERE. MOREOVER, WHITLAM'S WASHINGTON VISIT PRECEDES BY 12 DAYS THE VISIT OF THE CORAL SEA NAVAL TASK FORCE TO WESTERN AUSTRALIA. THIS VISIT SO FAR UNANNOUNCED. THUS, AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS WILL BE ALL THE MORE IN THE FOREFRONT OF AUSTRALIAN ATTENTION IN THE WEEKS AHEAD.
GREEN

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